

# The PhD and the Autonomous Self: gender, rationality and postgraduate pedagogy \*

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## *Abstract*

*Interventions in the quality of research training provided in universities today focus largely on educating supervisors and monitoring their performance as well as student progress. More private than any other scene of teaching and learning, postgraduate supervision - and more generally the pedagogic practices of the PhD - has largely remained unscrutinised and unquestioned. This article explores the problematic character of ideas of autonomy and the independent scholar that underpin the traditional practices of postgraduate pedagogy, particularly in the humanities and social sciences disciplines. These ideas are found to guide the practices of several different models of the supervisory relationship, whether they be of a pastoral care or more distant kind. The gendered character of the ideas of autonomy and the subject of knowledge that underlie these practices of postgraduate pedagogy are examined, as is the paradoxical nature of the processes of the production of the autonomous scholar self. The article concludes by suggesting some possible lines of thought for the future in addressing the problems in doctoral education identified through this analysis.*

## **Introduction**

Fundamentally, the department (and indeed the university itself) was unashamedly elitist. Since only a tiny proportion of school-leavers went on to university ... , academics could persist in the conviction that they were catering for the brightest and most dedicated. That attitude manifested itself in all sorts of ways, not the least in the apparent indifference to students, for which university people were to be so strenuously criticised in later years. There was indeed an icy, magisterial disdain in much of their dealings with us. And yet few of us resented it, because it was recognised by many - certainly by me - as a sign of respect. It was a wonderful liberation to be left to your own devices, without the watchful eye of those in charge. It seemed to mark more surely than any other ceremony our entry into the adult world, our being responsible for ourselves. That independence came at a price, it is true ... Of course, the examinations in November revealed all: those who failed to meet rigorous standards could expect little mercy. Yet none of us would have imagined that the responsibility was anyone's but ours. Most understood that our teachers equipped us with the means of meeting the standards required of us. To have taken steps to supervise our progress in the way of our contemporary academics would have seemed a breach of good manners - or intolerable intrusion. (Riemer, 1998, p. 13)

Andrew Riemer here recalls his life as an honours student at Sydney University in the late 1950s. He goes on to describe his experiences as a PhD student in London a few years later with a supervisor who also showed very little interest in his work. The only real opportunity Riemer had of contact with his PhD supervisor, the elusive Mr Brown, during the course of his candidature, was to find him in the local pub just off Tottenham Court Road. Riemer describes himself in the subtitle of his book as an 'accidental academic', yet his account of the years before he became an academic, of his education as an honours and PhD student in English Literature, and of his subsequent life as an academic at Sydney University, include a number of references to the fantasies which clearly led him to undertake these forms of training. He speaks, at various points in the book, of the dream of becoming an academic and of entertaining 'fantasies of the scholar's life', where he imagined himself in 'a handsome panelled library with thick leather-bound folios propped up in front of me' (Riemer, 1998, p. 64). He describes his aspirations to walk 'among dreaming spires' (p. 40) as he prepares to meet his PhD supervisor for the first time after arriving in England. He celebrates the pedagogy of indifference that he experienced at Sydney University and London University in the 1950s, which perversely, perhaps, made him feel part of an elite, but the description of his fantasies of being a scholar also indicates what sustained him as an aspiring academic and enabled him to find encouragement in disdain and neglect.

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Understanding the role of such fantasies is important in explaining the deep investments in, and attachments to, the existing structures and processes of the PhD that prevail in the humanities and social sciences today. The strength of these continuing attachments can be seen in the resistance to, and unease caused by, debates about so-called 'professional doctorates', as they can in the relentless search for quality controls on postgraduate education that do not at any stage seek to make either the PhD itself, or its primary pedagogical technology, the supervision relationship, problematic. Remaining substantially unaltered since the introduction of the degree in Australia after the Second World War, and deriving in large part from the practices developed in England in the 40 years prior to that (Simpson, 1983), the supervision relationship is personalised and frequently protracted. Through the pedagogical technologies of 'supervision' and of 'study', an intelligible academic identity is produced, a licensed scholar, a 'doctor', who, appropriately credentialled, is deemed safe to pursue research unsupervised, autonomously. More private than any other scene of teaching and learning, supervision - and more generally, the pedagogic practices of the PhD - in the humanities and social sciences at least, have remained largely unscrutinised and unquestioned.

Yet the supervision relationship is often fraught and unsatisfactory - as much marked by neglect, abandonment and indifference as it is by careful instruction or the positive and proactive exercise of pastoral power. The pedagogy of 'magisterial disdain', which Riemer describes as characterising the university as an elite institution, continues to have a role in the arena of postgraduate research training in the mass higher education system we have today. The experience of isolation and abjection often appears so widespread as to be structural and endemic, a seemingly 'necessary' feature of the doctoral programme for many, rather than an accidental and ameliorable problem. Indeed, it may in some senses be a condition of the production of independence and autonomy, which is the goal of the pedagogy and practice of the PhD. Certainly, Riemer's account of his experiences as an honours and PhD student suggests that for him this was the case. His narrative begins to show how the historically produced relations of power and desire between the academic and student are complexly bound up with the production and experience of, and the investment in, 'independence'. At the same time, we suggest, this production has, until recently, been intimately connected to, and necessarily dependent upon, the preservation of the domain of doctoral education for a tiny 'exemplary elite'. This has, of course, been historically a normatively masculine elite.

As Anna Yeatman (1998) points out, however, the 'traditional' (no matter how recent) personalised and privatised practices of the PhD supervision pedagogy are deeply problematic in the context of the development of a mass higher education system where PhD candidature has become much more frequent. For Yeatman (1998, p. 23) it is:

simply inadequate to the demands of a situation where many supervisees are barely socialised into the demands and rigours of an academic scholarly and research culture. It is especially inadequate to the needs of many new PhD aspirants who, by historical-cultural positioning, have not been invited to imagine themselves as subjects of *genius*. These include all those who are marginalised by the dominant academic scholarly culture: women, and men or women who come from the non-dominant class, ethnic or race positions. When PhD candidature was infrequent, the rare one of these could distinguish themselves as an exception to the rule of their particular gender, ethnic or class category, and show that by their highly exceptional qualities, they deserved to be admitted as a disciple. Even then, it was rare that their minority status did not continue to qualify their own belief as the belief of others in their *genius*. Now, however, there is a high proportion of PhD candidates who do not fit the old mould, and whose numbers bely any exceptionalist approach to them.

This article, then, explores the problematic character of ideas of autonomy and the independent scholar that underpin the traditional practices of postgraduate pedagogy. Despite the implication of Yeatman's argument that these practices are no longer appropriate in a mass higher education system, they persist largely unaltered in the current circumstances. Moves to make the training component of the PhD more explicit and more pronounced, in Australia, but more particularly in Britain, do not appear to have challenged in any fundamental way the deep attachment that persists among humanities and social sciences scholars, at least, to the supervisory relationship as being central to the pedagogy of the PhD.

The article is part of a larger research project on the history and practices of the PhD in the humanities and social sciences in Australia. In this project we seek to examine the productivity of

current practices of supervision and doctoral education more generally. We are interested in what form of personhood is assumed by the pedagogic practices of the PhD - that is, what do they set out to produce in terms of capacities and forms of subjectivity, whether it be by the pedagogy of indifference that Riemer celebrates, or newer, more bureaucratised approaches in which the progress of the student is more closely monitored, at the same time as the traditional supervisory relationship remains fundamentally intact (see also, Lee & Williams, 1999).

We have begun to see the gender problematics of the PhD as intimately connected to a series of paradoxes arguably at the heart of the enterprise of doctoral education in the late 1990s, but which stem from much older tensions and paradoxes central to modern conceptions of the educational project since the Enlightenment. In this article we focus particularly on the gendered character of the independent, autonomous scholar that lies at the heart of the pedagogic practices and regularity regimes of the PhD, and on the paradoxical nature of the processes of producing the autonomous scholar self that is seen as the goal of doctoral education. We look at some of the arguments of feminists who have addressed the question of the possibility of a feminist pedagogy and the implications for doctoral education. We conclude by suggesting that some of the arguments currently emerging about new modes of knowledge production may provide some fruitful directions for the future, in thinking about how to address some of the problems of doctoral education identified in this article.

The article draws on both oral history interviews of key figures in the formation of several humanities and social sciences disciplines in Australia, as well as interviews of current supervisors in these same disciplines. In this study we have focused primarily on the disciplines of English (and cultural studies), sociology and education. Many of the scholars interviewed for the oral history part of our project continue to supervise students today, but they also emerge as key figures in our interviews with current academic staff, either as models for their own supervisory practices or as central to the formation of the disciplines in which they work. We are not trying to present a detailed empirical account here of the interview work of our study, but to use several exemplary statements to explore the questions outlined earlier. The oral history interviews, as well as Riemer's account of his development as an academic, reveal the importance of the colonial relationship of Australia to Britain in the 1950s in the institutionalisation of these disciplines. This history is apparent, not only in the dominance of the fantasy of Oxbridge in the academic imaginary in Australia, but also in the way Australia adopted the British model of PhD training when it began to provide this form of training in the immediate post-war period. Australian postgraduate research education continues to rely almost solely on the production of a dissertation by the student after a period of extended study. Coursework is limited.

### **'Always-already' Independent**

There was no student whose thesis I read in full. And I told them at the beginning. And I said I'm not going to be reading more than half of this and if you are uneasy about that, I won't supervise you. I will recommend someone else. Because it is more than about ... it is more than just writing a thesis. It's about learning to be independent. And I think that's one of the great things in scholarship, learning ... but it's tough, you've got to learn to rely on your own judgement and not to run to the supervisor for every problem that you have. And that's the test in the end. And you can fail it. (*Oral history interview 1; April 1998*)

In this interview for the oral history part of our study, the interviewee describes her own experience of being a DPhil student in Oxford in the early 1950s as providing the model for the supervisory practices she was later to adopt, on her return to Australia, to ensure her students were independent scholars. It was, she reports, an Oxford rule that no supervisor was to read more than half the thesis. Her own supervisor explained the rule as: 'the reason is that we want to be quite clear in our own minds and we want the student to be quite clear that it is their work'. Oxford students (and, as it would appear from her own account, those of our interviewee) were required to reveal themselves as 'always-already' having the capacities for which they were to be credentialled at the end of the PhD process. They were to find in themselves the capacity to be autonomous, and they were to demonstrate that they could work on their own without supervision, just as they were to respond to assistance when it was made available. Recognising themselves as 'always-already' able to be the independent scholar, such students clearly were expected to be members of an elite whose previous training had produced in them the capacities and the sense of themselves that would secure their entry into this academic world, at the same time as it would enable them to respond positively to the warning that they would only be 'half' supervised.

Although she could not remember exactly why she wanted to go to Oxford, this interviewee reports having had 'a burning desire' to go there: 'I don't know why, I had no idea what it was like, I knew nothing about it, but I had this ambition to go to Oxford'. The 'dreaming spires' of the ancient university, the lure of just the name 'Oxford', or the image of the scholar in 'his' library, all represent continuing group fantasies or social utopias for the aspiring academic, just as the imagined, longed for, community of scholars continues to be a reference point which academics frequently invoke as representing the 'real university' of 'the past'. These fantasies are productive and sustaining of the desire to be a certain figure, the independent scholar. The body of the scholar that frequents these spaces is often the tweed-coated figure conjured up by Riemer's library full of leather-bound tomes (and echoed by many of the women and men who have participated in this and our earlier research). Of course, it is a masculine figure, even though women have managed throughout the history of the PhD to imagine themselves into these spaces, and hence to submit themselves to the pedagogical practices that both rely on and sustain these fantasies.

This is all the more remarkable when we look at the ideas of reason and autonomy that underlie the concept of the independent scholar so central to the PhD, and which the practices of supervision described by the interview with which we began this section were designed to produce. An analysis of these ideas suggests that the masculinity of the figure of the independent scholar invoked in doctoral education is more than simply a matter of PhD students being 'normally male' (Giblett, 1992; p. 137). Genevieve Lloyd's book, *The Man of Reason* first published in 1984, remains a key text in analysing the way in which Western ideals of Reason and Knowledge, and associated assumptions about the scholar or the subject of Knowledge, are profoundly masculine. The 'maleness of the Man of Reason' (Lloyd, 1984; p. ix), as she puts it, is not the result of a superficial linguistic bias, but stems from the way in which, from:

... the beginnings of philosophical thought, femaleness was symbolically associated with what Reason supposedly left behind - the dark powers of the earth goddesses, immersion in unknown forces associated with mysterious female powers. (Lloyd, 1984, p. 2)

'Rational knowledge', she says, 'has been construed as a transcending, transformation or control of natural forces; and the feminine has been associated with what rational knowledge transcends, dominates or simply leaves behind' (Lloyd, 1984; p. 2).

Lloyd examines the writing of figures like Descartes, Hume, Rousseau, Kant and Hegel to trace this tradition throughout the history of Western philosophy. In the seventeenth century, she argues, Reason became not just a distinguishing characteristic of mankind but a set of skills, a distinctive way of thinking to be learned. Descartes provided one of the most elaborated versions of what was understood to be involved in this way of thinking. For him, a precisely ordered mode of abstract thought could be applied to all fields of human endeavour, regardless of subject matter. This mode of reasoning was, according to Descartes, 'simply a systematization of the innate faculty of Reason or "good sense"', but it demanded a transcending of the body, of the practical activities of everyday life. '[T]he sharpness of his separation of the ultimate requirements of truth-seeking from the practical affairs of everyday life', says Lloyd (1984; pp. 49 - 50), 'reinforced already existing distinctions between male and female roles, opening the way to the idea of distinctive male and female consciousness'.

But, of the thinkers examined by Lloyd, it is probably the work of Kant that has had the most influence on the university curriculum and that of humanities particularly (see Readings, 1996). According to Kant, Lloyd argues, the Enlightenment required man to emerge from his own 'self-incurred immaturity'. Maturity for man, he proposed, consisted of having the 'courage to use your own understanding' without the guidance of another. Reason was precisely the power to judge autonomously, that is 'freely' (Kant, quoted in Hunter, 1995; p. 67); and access to 'a public space of autonomous speech', Kant believed, was essential for man to be able to exercise this Reason (Lloyd, 1984; pp. 66 - 67). While he did not develop, in any explicit form, a gendered characterisation of the capacities of humanity to pursue the ability to exercise one's own judgement, his discussion of an immature consciousness under the sway of 'guardians', 'as are the entire fair sex', and his stress on public space as the location of autonomous speech and the exercise of Reason, suggest that Kant necessarily saw women falling short of the humanity required of the subjects of Reason (Lloyd, 1984; pp. 66 - 70).

Both Kant and Rousseau had distinct notions about the spatial requirements for the exercise of Reason and autonomous judgement. While Kant insisted on the need for access to a public space 'in which men of learning enjoy unlimited freedom to use their own reason and "speak in their own person" ' (Lloyd, 1984; p. 68), Rousseau, according to Lloyd (1984; p. 59), believed that 'a few "learned of the first rank" should be given an "honourable refuge" in the courts of princes, where they might by their influence promote "the happiness of the people they have enlightened by their wisdom" ' . According to Bill Readings (1996; p. 58), Kant envisaged the modern university as guided by the concept of Reason and argued that the state had an obligation to protect the university in order to ensure the rule of Reason in public life. Thus, the university becomes one of the essential spaces in which the autonomous subject of Reason is understood to be located (even though Kant had some difficulties with the institutionalisation of Reason that such ideas appeared to imply). Nineteenth-century German ideas about the university, such as those of Schleiermacher and Humboldt, which then played a major role in shaping concepts of the functioning and organisation of modern universities, reworked Kant' s arguments, replacing, according to Readings, the idea of Reason as the guiding principle of the university with the idea of Culture. But what certainly remains is the concept of the university as being the protected space of autonomous judgement, of the independent scholar - whether as 'honourable refuge' or as exemplary public sphere. And with these moves, the 'Man of Reason', as analysed by Genevieve Lloyd, is placed at the centre of the university and the role of the personal and the irrational are disavowed in understandings of how this figure is to be produced. The scholar is required to develop a particular ethical comportment or 'relation of the self', as Ian Hunter (1995; pp. 76 - 78) points out, through which, according to this modern conception of Reason, 'he' learns to purify his will of sensuous inclinations.

Many feminists have now critiqued the long-standing dualisms in Western culture associated with the concept of Reason: rationality and irrationality, subject and object, autonomy and dependence. But while some have argued that the idea of Reason itself should be abandoned (see Harding, 1986), others, like Zoe Sofia (1993; p. 23) (now Sofoulis), however, have proposed that the abstracted mode of thought associated with this concept simply be demoted to just one of the tools of thought to be used in any process of thinking or understanding. At the same time, she adds, we should recognise that Reason is a fantasy. As a fantasy, it invokes both dreams of mastery/domination *and* dreams of pleasure in being the 'reasonable person' - one who is in love with ideas rather than bodies, one who is able to triumph over the contingency of the body and the unreasonableness of the emotions (Sofia, 1993; p. 29). In thus banishing the emotions and the embodiment of the individual, the fantasy of Reason, according to Jessica Benjamin (1990; p. 185), is 'patently linked to the split between the father of autonomy and the mother of dependency'. The rational, autonomous individual establishes his identity by separating off from, and in opposition to, this mother and by 'splitting off certain human capabilities, called feminine' (Benjamin, 1990; p. 189). Autonomy is achieved by rejecting the emotions, embodiment and human dependency.

Traditional practices of PhD supervision, whether they be the neglect and indifference recalled by Andrew Riemer or the tough-minded but more carefully targeted regimes described by oral history interviewee 1, assume 'autonomy' - in the form of the exemplary figure of the independent scholar - to be the desired outcome. Our analysis suggests that this figure is a problematic one for the profoundly gendered character of the assumptions of Reason and autonomy it invokes. Of course, not all supervisors have been neglectful, nor have they necessarily taken the stance of oral history interviewee 1 in explicitly demanding that the PhD student be effectively 'always-already' capable of independent scholarship from the beginning of their candidature. However, in the next section we analyse how even the more pastorally-oriented practices of supervision continue to work unproblematically within the notions of Reason and autonomy from the Enlightenment tradition analysed earlier and, indeed, deploy a regime of person formation, the roots of which can be found in the ideas of Rousseau. Our interest here is in the paradoxical character of the processes of person formation involved in the shaping of the autonomous scholar self.

### **Invisible Pedagogies**

So I suppose I've made the assumption that these students have got ... [pause] any student that I've come in contact with has had an immense amount to offer, is different from the last student that I had, is different from the ... [pause] who' s got different intellectual interests, different abilities and my task as supervisor is to try to find out what they are and help them, challenge them, maybe, but not impose my own personal interests ... [pause] I guess that's what I mean by trying to get inside their minds, to challenge their mind, to help the person if they needed help if you

could, and then when they finished they owned it. They'd written it not me, although I'd influenced it I suppose ... [pause] my image of what my students would say was that I drove them mad about that and I did but I was ... [pause] it was part of making them independent. (*Oral history interview 2; April 1998*)

In *Sentimental Education*, James Donald (1992) traces the historical effects on modern systems of education of the Enlightenment project which sought to produce the Rational Man. Indeed, for Kant, education was central to the achievement of humanity: 'Man can only become man by education' (Kant, cited in Donald, 1992; p. 4). At the centre of eighteenth-century European conceptions of education, suggests Donald, lies a paradox which, arguably, remains in contemporary educational conceptions and practices and which finds perhaps its most intense formulation in the PhD. This is the paradox of the apparently conflicting demands of liberty and regulation, autonomy and restraint in the educational project. As indicated in the previous section, these demands do not exist independently of the Enlightenment project, but derive from its formulation by thinkers like Kant and Rousseau who, in critiquing the individualistic form this project had taken in German speculative idealist philosophy, sought to assert the demands of both the human soul for freedom and autonomy and the 'higher need' for attention to the moral well-being and happiness of the human species as a whole (Vekley, 1989; pp. 32 - 39). In the work of Kant, for instance, 'man' can only become independent and rational through the imposition of restraint (Donald, 1992; p. 4). In educational terms, individual autonomy and independence can only be achieved 'through submission to pedagogic norms' (Donald, 1992; p. 4). This apparent paradox attained its most explicit formulation in the work of Rousseau.

For Rousseau, children's natures needed to be educated (protectively) against the harmful influences of society. Their innate psychological and physical patterns needed space to develop from within, but they needed to develop in the direction of rationality and independence. The changes produced by education, then, were, seemingly ironically, both spontaneous and desired. The role of the Tutor was crucial in choreographing these changes while appearing to be benevolently standing by, 'supervising'. Rousseau's injunction to Tutors is worth quoting at some length here:

Let [your pupil] always think he is master while you are really master. There is no subjection so complete as that which preserves the forms of freedom; it is thus that the will itself is taken captive. Is not this poor child, without knowledge, strength, or wisdom, entirely at your mercy? Are you not master of his whole environment so far as it affects him? Cannot you make of him what you please? His work and play, his pleasure and pain, are they not, unknown to him, under your control? *No doubt he ought only to do what he wants, but he ought to want to do nothing but what you want him to do.* (Rousseau, cited in Donald, 1992; p. 5; emphasis added)

Rousseau named the pedagogy of the education of Emile, 'well-regulated liberty'. The end of this pedagogy was the identification by Emile with the authoritative position from which he is observed and managed by the Tutor. Upon this identification, he is given 'a mandate to act as a free agent within the intersubjective symbolic network' (Donald, 1992; p. 7).

Such, we want to suggest, is the pedagogy described in oral history interview 2 with which we began this section. It is an 'invisible pedagogy' in the terms outlined by Basil Bernstein (1977), in his analysis of child-centred approaches to education. Unlike the pedagogy described in oral history interview 1, quoted in the previous section of this article, it requires a more subtle exercise of power. The supervisor's task is to arrange the context, to attend to the student's needs and differences, and to observe and monitor. Necessary to the sense of autonomy that is the end-point of this pedagogy for the development of the rational, independent scholar, the student must experience themselves as in control, as author of their intentions, as exercising free will and independence. The goal of a more explicit pedagogy in which the student is told that they will only be half-read, half-supervised, is the same, but in the case of a more invisible pedagogical style, 'regulation', in Valerie Walkerdine's (1985) terms, in her analysis of progressive education, 'has gone underground'. The supervisor is caring, solicitous, not disdainful or indifferent, but nevertheless 'master', in control. He acknowledges that the students go through considerable stress and pain, but this is necessary to the process of development, of attaining maturity.

'Supervision' carries powerful overtones of 'overseeing' (of 'looking over' and 'looking after') production and development with regard to academic knowledge and identity. All research degrees, and especially those associated with doctoral work, are required by formal legislation to be subject to 'supervision', which means that both the student (the 'candidate')

and the dissertation are to be constructed under the authorised and authorising gaze of an already-established researcher, standing in, in some sense, for the field of study in question and for the Academy more generally. Elsewhere, in a manner strikingly reminiscent of the tutelary regime of Rousseau's *Emile*, Evans & Green (1995; p. 7) have noted:

'Supervision' in this sense is better grasped as a 'pan-optics' of pedagogic power, with due regard for its *productivity* in terms of securing the best conditions for postgraduate research and training and hence for the formation of appropriate research(er) subjectivities. Here postgraduate pedagogy might well be better understood as a matter of artfully arranging the educational environment for the novice researcher, with 'environment' conceived here as inclusive of resources, information, accommodation, different or multiple perspectives, expertise, networks, 'direct instruction', and so on.

This regime holds powerful sway in the pedagogies articulated by the oral history participants cited earlier; this is in spite of the fact that often, in relation to their own work, 'the student is more likely to have the over-view (super-view) than the super-visor' (see Brennan & Walker, 1994).

Like the Tutor and the Pupil of Rousseau's pedagogy, the supervisor and the doctoral candidate play out a fantasy in which the student produces 'their own thesis' and, in doing so, is produced as an autonomous and rational scholar. This more-or-less invisible pedagogy of 'super-vision' is one of assuming 'liberty', under a surveillance which is more or less invisible in its normativity. What is disavowed or glossed over is the paradoxical nature of the processes of the production of the autonomous scholar self. The roots of this paradox, as we have indicated, emerged within the Enlightenment tradition in the eighteenth century, as thinkers like Rousseau and Kant sought to reconcile the demands of individual freedom and social integration, and to claim them complementary. The *Bildungsroman* tradition represents a further attempt to establish the legitimacy of these two imperatives and to resolve the seeming conflict between them (see Donald, 1992; p. 8). In the licensing or credentialing practices of doctoral education, the PhD works within the narrative form adopted by the more conservative strand of this literary tradition, in which both demands are reconciled in an apparently harmonious solution. The licensed scholar, the desired outcome of doctoral education, is one who both indicates 'his' deep indebtedness to the masters, to authorities in the field, through the literature review considered fundamental to the standard dissertation format for the PhD, and displays 'his' autonomy – 'his' readiness for independent research, through the demand for 'originality' considered axiomatic in institutional specifications of what distinguishes the PhD from other university degrees.

Thus, the centrality of the ideal of the autonomous, independent scholar to postgraduate pedagogy can be seen in a range of possible different scenarios for the practices of supervision. The three that we have looked at by no means necessarily constitute the full range of practices adopted by supervisors until recent times, but they represent significant traditions which continue to have salience today, despite the shift to greater bureaucratic monitoring of the supervisory relationship. That the ideal of the autonomous self is unproblematic in all three scenarios testifies to its centrality to the history of the PhD, at the same time as it indicates how powerfully but silently its assumptions about who has the right to regard themselves as ready to take on the mantle of the subject of Knowledge, the 'one who knows', continue to operate unscrutinised. In the final section of this article we turn to explore briefly how some women have negotiated the supervisory relationship, focusing only here on supervisors. We are interested in the extent to which women have rejected or struggled with the centrality of traditional conceptions of the autonomous scholar to postgraduate pedagogy. We also consider the arguments of a number of feminists who have sought to address the question of the possibility of a feminist pedagogy and the implications of their concerns for doctoral education. Finally, we discuss the extent to which arguments about the emergence of new modes of knowledge production might suggest a new image of the scholar, that takes us beyond the paradoxes and tensions of the Enlightenment project for doctoral education, but potentially, perhaps, also confronts us with new complexities.

### **A New Image of the Scholar?**

In a sense it's an incredibly charged relationship and she can be just awful, and she pushes everyone around, and my head of school can't bear to talk to her. But there is obviously something there in that I think it's not anything I've done, I think she's cast me as a sort of ... [pause] not quite sure, it's not a mother figure but it's something close to that I suppose. It's also an authority figure ...

I think right at the start I'm very sympathetic and I listen, as I'm sure Anne does too, you listen, you're very careful to try and pick up what it is you think they're trying to formulate. Into the bargain you also hear about their private stuff. Jenny tells me the same thing happens with her, that they dump on women a lot of the private stuff and I'm quite sure that's true. And, you know, they'll feel relieved and happy that they've let you know their total picture whereas the male students don't do that. Well, one of them does but it's taken time and he's a practising artist, so he's a bit different. David. Yeah, he's quite different from the other couple of men I've got. The men are very independent and very ... [pause] you know they don't have this kind of ... [pause] it's a very warm relationship but they don't ... the women just want to tell you, especially if they're on the premises. (*Interview with female supervisor; June 1998*)

In our interviews with current supervisors, we have heard stories of women who, in attempting to move away from the position of 'master' - whether explicitly or implicitly - have felt overwhelmed in their relationships with students. Frequently torn between their students' expectations (and no doubt their own) for someone who is both 'the mother of dependency' and 'the father of autonomy', in Jessica Benjamin's terms, they find it difficult to create a new and satisfactory role for the PhD supervisor. Indeed, the family drama endures as the frame within which even alternative narratives and procedural metaphors are imagined, whether it be by someone trying to be both 'mother' and 'father', simply 'mother', or yet again 'sister' (see, for example, Bartlett & Mercer, 1999).

These are not new problems in the attempt by women to devise feminist pedagogical practices as effective alternatives within higher education more generally. As Lauren Berlant (1997) indicates, feminist teaching has now developed its own fantasies that can be just as troublesome for women as those traditional to the university. The teacher, for example, who is 'indefinitely patient, available, confident in her knowledge, an intellectual and sexual role model, who uses her long office hours therapeutically to help students develop subjectivity and self-esteem and to solve personal problems', Berlant (1997, p. 147) suggests, became part of the iconography of women's studies and feminist pedagogy in the 1970s and 1980s. She argues that this fantasy seeks pleasure in the identification between teachers and students just as much as traditional pedagogies of the university based more securely on Enlightenment ideals. It is a fantasy that potentially leaves women exhausted, burnt out. Although not all feminist pedagogies pose the problems that Berlant suggests, her analysis reminds us that an apparently feminist stance does not necessarily solve the issues encountered in higher education, such as those we have outlined in the previous sections of our article. Just as Berlant has pointed to the dangers that can emerge in feminist practices of undergraduate teaching, the feminist graduate student supervisor, endlessly responding to her students' needs and demands, certainly needs to be questioned too as an unsatisfactory alternative to the 'master' Tutor.

Part of the solution to this problem lies in recognising, as Vicki Kirby (1994, p. 19) argues, the conditions of *impossibility* of a feminist pedagogy. Women need to acknowledge, she says, their 'passion for the *power* in learning, our delight in the flirtatiousness of intellectual debate, in the game of competing ... in the sexiness of winning'; a woman's desire for authority, she insists, should not be diagnosed as a moral failing. Pedagogical practices, at whatever level, need to be recognised as deeply implicated, necessarily, in the relationships of power that they are committed to in playing out these desires. A more self-conscious approach to the goal of pedagogical practices too, in terms of the forms of personhood, the capacities and modes of comportment to be produced in students, will also assist supervisors to work with the diversity of students now involved in the mass higher education system. An implicit pedagogy, whether of the more pastoral kind, or in the genre of magisterial disdain or in the form of only 'half-teaching', may work for those who are 'always-already' in part shaped as the form of personhood that these practices seek to produce. But it does not necessarily work so effectively, at least, for a more diverse, mass population - particularly for that group, women, for whom the form of personhood currently required as an independent scholar potentially involves the negation of the values and modes of operating historically associated with their gendered identities. Although individual women have clearly developed desires to be the independent scholar, these desires are likely to be differently infected as women have sought ways of imagining themselves as such a figure outside those provided by the dominant cultural representations of university life.

But the question remains: is it appropriate to continue to retain the seemingly unproblematic status of autonomy or independence as the goal of postgraduate pedagogy? In part, what seems necessary is a greater acknowledgement of and engagement with the apparently conflicting demands of autonomy and authority, of the way in which autonomy is a question of achieving 'a



well-regulated liberty' rather than a matter of untrammelled freedom. The demand for students to be 'original' is not a question of their throwing off or stepping outside the domain of knowledge in which they have been trained, but simply of their achieving a licence to understand themselves as contributing to this domain, as being the subject of Knowledge. As Barry Hindess (1995, p. 41) argues, in considering a different set of issues about the modern university, 'autonomy' involves the internalisation of authority rather than being fundamentally opposed to it.

In understanding the goal of autonomy as learning, in Hindess's (1995, p. 40) terms, 'to identify the appropriate rules for oneself', the apparent intensity of the demands of the PhD can potentially be reduced. The autonomy sought of the student can be recognised as a set of capacities, a mode of conducting oneself, that can be learned - and taught - rather than a capacity which already exists in the individual and has to be revealed in order for him or her to be or become the successful PhD candidate. The supervisor no longer needs to be 'master' in whatever guise, but a teacher of particular skills, ways of thinking and writing. But pursuing such a line of argument, and the possible pedagogical strategies that might flow from it, while important, does not necessarily engage with a central issue addressed in this article - the issue of the way in which the subject of Knowledge assumed by the fantasy of Reason has been understood in masculine terms.

However, other pressures are beginning to occur in and around universities which may undermine the status of this fantasy and its efficacy in the production of knowledge. These developments, in turn, could precisely bring about the demise of this fantasy, or at least a rethinking, in ways that might be useful in addressing the gendered character of the figure of the independent scholar. According to the work of people like Michael Gibbons and his colleagues (1994), knowledge is no longer necessarily being produced by the independent scholar within the university, and then applied 'outside' in the realms of the economy, business, or policy. They suggest that knowledge is increasingly being produced in collaborations between universities and these other agencies, addressing problems in context, often in interdisciplinary ways.

Gibbons *et al.*'s work has been criticised for exaggerating the differences between traditional and new modes of knowledge production. It has been suggested by Benoit Godin (1998), for example, that Gibbons *et al.* are more involved in writing a performative history of changes in the organisation of knowledge than looking at the reality of what scientists do and have done. Rather than documenting major shifts in how research is done, they are operating as social analysts interested in influencing government and university policy. They are wanting to reshape the models of academic research, and the underlying rhetoric about the scholar, so that there is more emphasis in science policy, nationally and internationally, on collaborative research between universities, industry and the community.

But what interests us in this article is precisely the way a certain image of the scholar, a fantasy of how knowledge is produced, shapes current practices of postgraduate pedagogy. The PhD as a form of research training, in the humanities and social sciences at least, is based on the idea of the independent scholar working free from connections with the 'outside world', a disembedded and disembodied figure driven by the love of ideas, of scholarship, alone. With the arguments emerging, as outlined earlier, about new modes of knowledge production, new fantasies could begin at least to coexist with or even undermine those around the romantic figure of 'the scholar'. While continuing to incite and sustain desires around the power of knowledge and the pleasure of demonstrating certain competencies or capacities associated with the subject of Knowledge, a new figure of the scholar would appear to be more appropriate to forms of research training associated with new modes of knowledge production. If the arguments of Gibbons *et al.* gain acceptance in the university context, the collaboration they claim to be emerging as characteristic of new modes of knowledge production will require skills of learning to work with a diverse range of individuals. It will also encourage recognition of the contribution of others rather than a preoccupation with whether or not one is demonstrating the appropriate characteristics of the autonomous self.

These developments could precisely open up a different space for those women in doctoral programmes who, in the past, have found their identities as scholars and gendered beings in conflict. To the extent that universities begin to accept that new modes of producing knowledge are emerging, or should at least be thought about, they will require researchers who are skilled in collaboration, in the recognition of the interdependence of human relations, and in the appreciation of the concrete skills and specific capacities of others. These shifts constitute a potential major challenge to the notion of autonomous judgement as being essential to the subject of Knowledge.

In this context, it would seem that those characteristics historically associated with the feminine could become valued rather than negated in producing the new type of researcher. As we indicated in the second section of this article, autonomy has been conceptualised in terms of the rejection of the emotions, embodiment and human dependency. Yet, the argument that a new mode of the production of knowledge is emerging would appear to require the development of capacities where these oppositions are no longer appropriate. Research training to produce scholars able to work in these new ways will require students to develop sensitivities to the concerns of others, a willingness to work with others, and a capacity to reason or make judgements on the basis of contextual information rather than relying purely on abstract, universalising principles. In the teaching of these skills to PhD students, new forms of pedagogy would need to emerge and the primacy of the supervisory relationship be reviewed. And in reconsidering this central pedagogical technology of the PhD for the sort of research training needed for new modes of the production of knowledge, it may also be possible to go beyond the family drama as the only frame within which to think about the relationships appropriate to managing the challenge of the PhD. Of course, the danger also exists, in very real ways, that the developments that we have outlined may be the occasion simply for new definitions of the Subject of Knowledge to emerge that are just as masculine as those that have gone before. The task for feminist pedagogies will be to attempt to open up the spaces that these developments potentially allow for a more democratic and inclusive definition of this Subject.

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